

Bikes without Borders: Transboundary Tourism, Collaboration, and Rural Development in  
Montenegro

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## Abstract

The end of the international embargo on Serbia and Montenegro in 2006 created growing visitor interest in the West Balkan region, and its natural and cultural heritage. Yet, political instability and lingering ethnic/religious strife limit tourism development in some inland and transboundary locations. Furthermore, the industry has been slow to create sufficient jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities for economically deprived populations, while the governments of Croatia, Montenegro, and Albania prioritise mass development along the Adriatic coast instead.

In response, this paper employs a strategic management approach to identify Critical Success Factors (CSF) for successful, sustainable, and supportive bike tourism in Montenegro's rural and cross-border communities. The goal is to ascertain whether bicycle tourism is a model for sustainable development in Montenegro and the West Balkan region (Lumsdon, 2000).

Our initial analysis is informed by qualitative and quantitative data from bicycle tourists and regional proponents, and an assessment of existing tourism management practices and political processes. Collectively, the CSF provide prescriptive frameworks for efficient and affordable community-based bike tourism in Montenegro, and a blueprint to enhance the visitor experience for domestic and international tourists. A baseline is also established on which to measure and mitigate impacts as bike tourism evolves socially and spatially across the country. This knowledge is essential if Montenegro is to succeed as a bike tourism leader both regionally and globally.

**Keywords:** Bicycle tourism, cross-border collaboration, destination marketing, Montenegro, post-conflict travel, West Balkans

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An estimated 1.25 billion households in 150 countries (42% of the world's total) now own at least one bicycle, with global ownership exceeding 580 million bikes (Figure 1). Though most owners bicycle for work, a growing number of riders now use participate through bike tourism, defined by Ritchie (1998) as the use of bicycles for a more personal and immersive travel experience for solo bicyclists and multi-biker tours. For proponents, bicycle tourism "is an emergent way of understanding an array of economic activities involving the bicycle ... where business, tourism, and advocacy meet" (Russ, 2013, p. 1). As such, the term encompasses 'any travel-related activity for the purpose of pleasure which incorporates a bicycle' (Adventure Cycling Association, 2019, p. 1) -- whether short- or long-distance, or biking paved roads and tour routes, or off-road on designated mountain bike trails and gravel paths.

For bike tourists, the option to bicycle is a necessary feature when selecting travel destinations, and the most desired locations offer diverse organized bicycle activities, races, tours, and social events. The exponential rise in bike tourism – and more broadly, adventure travel and active outdoor recreation -- has fueled an expanding network of bicycle producers and activities, trails, and service facilities throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas, and bike tourism now ranks among the fastest growth niches in heritage travel and outdoor recreation worldwide.

According to a global survey of the Adventure Tourism Trade Association, 46% of the revenue of adventure tourism companies was derived from sales of cycling trips or related cycling travel services in 2014. The same survey also indicated that demand for cycling trips is increasing (CBI Market Intelligence, 2015, p. 4; see also McKay, 2013).

In the United States, an estimated 48 million people now bicycle recreationally per year, contributing almost \$100 billion per year to the economy, and ranking bicycle tourism second after camping in gross annual revenue in outdoor recreation. If current trends hold worldwide, the global bicycle market is expected to show equal growth, from USD \$45.6 billion in 2016 to USD \$64.4 billion in 2020 (ATKearney, 2018; BIRN, 2013; Blue, 2011; Chapalain, 2018; Chen & Lee, 2017; European Union Regional Development Fund, 2014; GoodPlace, 2018; Gunst, 2016; Innovation Norway, 2016; Kline, 2017; Metcalfe, 2003; NBC News, 2018; Outdoor Industry Association & Southwick Associates, 2017; Pavlevski, 2012; Pratte, 2010; Research & Markets, 2018; Rocca, 2011; Worldwatch Institute, 2018).

For rural communities, particularly those in post-conflict and transboundary areas, this globalization of bike tourism offers new opportunity to capitalize on alternative economic development models and to build collaborative, cross-border partnerships and policies. Unlike some tourism activities and venues that require expensive infrastructure and amenities, bike tourists epitomize ‘the significance of sustainable development’ (Topler, 2017, p. 498).

## **1. Bicycle Tourism**

While some visitors seek passive leisure alone, bike tourists are generally more physically active, and enjoy nature and learning through direct experience and immersion in other cultures. More than 80% have a college education, and almost 60% report higher incomes. Perhaps, as a result, bike tourists also tend to be ‘geotourists – interested in experiencing the distinctive characteristics of a place, including its culture, landscape, history, and the well-being of its residents’ (National Geographic Society, 2019, p. 2). As such, they prefer to ‘spend locally, make meaningful connections with locals, and explore off the beaten path’ (Adventure Cycling Association, 2019, p. 2). To do so, riders look for routes and destinations that connect them – figuratively and literally – to rural communities and attractions that successfully blend ‘a country’s heritage, culture, and natural landscape’ (ATKearney, 2018, p. 99; Tourism British Columbia, 2010).

Eager to take advantage of this desire, the U.S. state of Oregon crafted a series of scenic bikeways and ‘Oregon Country Trails,’ that now link bike tourists to natural and historic sites, as well as organic farms, vineyards, family farms, and other local artisans and producers. In the state's largest city, Portland, almost 70% of businesses are now enrolled in the local SmartTrips Business program, where biking and walking promotions help them market their services and

products (Beierle, 2013; Cycle Oregon, 2013; Dean Runyan Associates, 2013; Maus, 2013; Portland Office of Transportation, 2008; Thalheimer, 2013; Travel Oregon, 2013).

On the European continent, similar expectations are held for the EuroVelo, a 70,000 kilometer, 15-trail cycling network of trans-continental bicycle routes scheduled to be completed by 2020. One leg, in particular, may serve as a model for the West Balkans. Located in the transnational region between Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Macedonia, this southern extension of the longer Iron Curtain Trail cycle route is intended to provide economic and environmentally sustainable sources of income for rural residents in participating countries, by combining bike tourism with other cultural and heritage tourism niches like literary tourism, which 'can be useful in supporting the existent tourism activities and helping to develop new ones' (Topler, 2016; p. 129; see also Association of South-western Municipalities, 2011; Wachunas, 2017).

The Trans Dinarica is further evidence of the growing popularity of transboundary cycling across the West Balkan region. Currently connecting Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Croatia, the trail, if fully completed, will allow bicyclists to travel through 'all eight countries in the Western Balkans and eventually encompass Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, and Macedonia' (Crevar, 2019, p. 1). The trail network, designed to encourage more travelers to experience these countries, combines outdoor recreation and adventure travel with food, music, and stories to entertain and educate riders about the region's shared heritage and geography. The trails also provide a lifeline for rural villages and residents in the mountainous areas, who benefit from the improved infrastructure and greater opportunity for local businesses, a critical factor in sustaining the West Balkan region (Van Hoof, 2006).

For these rural destinations and others, bike tourism has enhanced cross-border collaboration through common planning frameworks and management policies, while multicultural learning is facilitated through greater access to historic sites, national parks, and other heritage assets by leisure riders of all skill levels. Greater appreciation of the ecological savings of bike tourism is also growing, as host communities achieve lower infrastructure costs through 'green' materials and designs, reduced energy consumption, and smaller carbon footprints from bike tourism. Regional and global partnerships are expanding as well, as stakeholders adopt common transportation practices to ease travel restrictions for cross-border bicyclists and extend routes across national borders. In each case, there is a common goal: use bike tourism to improve local livelihoods through income generation and greater 'recognition of local identity, effective participation and secure rights to land and natural resources' (NBC News, 2018, p. 1; see also Friend, 2017).

Many projects underway, however, are weakened by political policies and ethnic distrust, limited financial and human resources, a lack of guidance, and the fractured nature of the recreational bike industry. Minimal community stakeholder input and interest diminished benefits in some areas, while limited visitor knowledge and ethnic misperceptions handicap even well-established bike routes and destinations. Other proposed trails are bisected by wildlife and refugee migration routes, raising environmental and social concerns, and costs, for stakeholders (Beierle, 2013; Berten, 2011; Dieke, 2005; McNamee, 2013; Mozer, 2013; Oke, Bhalla, Love & Siddiqui, 2015; Tausan, 2010; Topler, 2016; VB Center d.o.o., 2012; Worldwatch Institute, 2018).

Nevertheless, for those who question 'so what?', the momentum in bicycling worldwide affords significant opportunities and benefits for rural communities -- if appropriately designed, developed, managed, marketed, and monitored. Thus, the question for bike tourism proponents is no longer solely how to promote bicycle use, but where to design, develop, brand, and market local bike systems and 'best practices' that acknowledge the changing social and recreational interests, and growing global environmental concerns over political violence, climate change and the natural environment, poverty and social injustice, and human health?

## **2. Research Objectives**

It is these questions that this paper seeks to research. Applying a 'triple bottom-line' analysis, the initial objectives are 1) to identify activities and policies critical to bicycle tourism's success in Montenegro, and 2) to measure and evaluate bike tourism's effectiveness to economically support the country's cultural and natural heritage, and to contribute to rural development and cross-border partnerships in the Republic of Montenegro and by extension, the broader West Balkan region. To do so, a modified Delphi method was applied to survey stakeholder visions and to help:

- Identify dominant and recurring visitor interests, motives, and information sources available to, and used by a broad range of stakeholders, including community residents, bicyclists and other visitors, government and non-government agencies, and tourism providers.
- Document existing and planned bike tourism infrastructure and investment in the country, in order to quantify economic and social benefits and costs for rural community stakeholders.
- Examine Montenegro's strengths as a destination for bike tourists, using a PEEST analysis (external and internal political, economic, environmental, social, and technological factors).
- Evaluate Montenegro's weaknesses compared to regional and global competitors, including limited access to multi-lingual signage and online/social media information for international bikers, lack of specialized training and financial support for business owners and entrepreneurs interested in bike tourism, and facility and activity design.
- Communicate the value of bicycling tourism to local, national, and regional stakeholders by identifying critical success factors and pathways for Montenegro's emerging bike tourism industry and all stakeholders, including specific activities and operator guidelines.

### ***2.1 Critical Success Factors***

Critical success factors (CSF) are defined as 'those aspects that must be well managed [by the destination community] in order to achieve success' (Marais, du Plessis & Saayman, 2016, p. 1). The CSF are derived by examination of specific visitor activities and locational impacts, and the broader institutional and social management processes applied. This includes data on emerging trends in the global bike tourism industry, local and transboundary management practices and regulations, national tourism marketing methods, and an array of inter-related bicycle support services, existing and planned amenities, bicycle business clusters, and collaborative stakeholders now found on almost every continent. Also included are the elements most frequently cited as essential to bicycle tourism's success and sustainability in Montenegro, and considered practical and affordable by involved stakeholders.

Identification and prioritization of the CSF provides a useful framework to guide and measure bike tourism's effectiveness over time at the micro- and macro-level. Appropriate

courses of action can be better informed and implemented, and more constructive systems and regulatory policies applied to adequately manage, market, and measure tourism activities and impacts, earnings and lost opportunity costs (tangible and intangible), and the efficient use and survival of resources over time (Baker & Cameron, 2008; Gronau & Kagermeier, 2007; Jaafar, 2011; Jonker, 2004; Lucchetti & Font, 2013; Mozer, 2013; Stojanoski & Elmazi, 2012).

In Germany, a CSF analysis found bike tourism was an important economic factor, ‘especially in rural areas . . . for small and medium businesses’ (Van Schaik, 2013, p. 1). The German Parliament, in response, expanded cycling tourism through a designated ‘Bed Bike’ label and the establishment of eco-certified, bicycle-friendly hotels and guest facilities. The Canadian province of British Columbia also profited by focusing on the CSF of mountain bike tourism through increased destination awareness of tourism visitor numbers, revenue, and tax income. Results quadrupled bike tourism revenue in the region (from USD \$2.3 million in 2006 to \$9.9 million in 2016), thereby enabling stakeholders to improve community infrastructure, generate greater community support for youth recreation and business innovation, create a more diverse regional economic base, and improve destination competitiveness (Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2009; Freeman & Thomlinson, 2014; Van Hoof, 2006).

## ***2.2 Montenegro Tourism***

Such possibilities have generated intense interest in bike tourism among Montenegro’s isolated, mountain communities. Labeled a biological ‘hot spot,’ with the highest species diversity in Europe, northern Montenegro is home to approximately 37% of the country’s population, a number that has declined drastically from a peak of 81% in 1960 as jobs and people relocate to the urbanized Adriatic coast. The rural Muslim and Orthodox mountain communities, long reliant on agriculture or state-sponsored manufacturing industries and resource extraction, now seek new business models to sustain themselves. For many residents, the bicycle and outdoor recreation industry is an attractive alternative to drive business growth and create entrepreneurs and jobs, as their small towns reposition themselves as adventure destinations for bicycle enthusiasts and mountain bikers (Centre for Sustainable Tourism Initiatives, 2007; Centre for Sustainable Tourism Initiatives, 2010; Centre for Sustainable Tourism Initiatives & The Centre for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, 2007; Drobnjak, 2017; Jerkov, Milic, Dragisic & Djuranovic, 2009).

Since Montenegro attained political independence in 2006, the economy has slowly rebounded. Tourism, in particular, has bounced back after the end of the global embargo imposed on Montenegro for its union with Serbia, with more than 2 million visitors recorded in 2017. As a result: ‘Travel and tourism has played a central role in Montenegro’s dramatic growth and transformation’ (Ministry of Tourism & Environment, 2008, p. 2), and now accounts for 11% of GDP, contributing an estimated €500 (USD \$615 million) to the country’s economy in 2018 (SeeNews, 2018, p. 1).

For bicycle tourism to contribute to this economic success, and to avoid the mass tourism congestion prevalent along Montenegro’s coast, travel providers and rural stakeholders in Montenegro require a common vision and knowledge of the critical determinants for bike tourism that reinforces local and regional partnerships, leverages funding, and extends the reach of cross-border planning, marketing, and management efforts. Such information is especially lacking in rural locations and cross-border regions across the West Balkans, where differing

country management schemes and conservation measures adversely impact natural and human environments that define regional identity (Bučar, 2017).

The National Tourism Organization of Montenegro did update its Tourism Master Plan to provide guidance for three years. Among the tourism products highlighted were ecotourism, rural tourism, and mountain tourism, with emphasis on a 'national development program for hiking and biking, with new infrastructure and services' (Centre for Sustainable Tourism Initiatives, 2008, p. 1). Most notable, the master plan prioritizes northern Montenegro by linking popular beach attractions with the mountainous interior. Guidelines encourage integrated travel itineraries and products that extend the visitor season beyond summer. To incentivize coastal visitors to venture inland, a network of emerging bicycle and hiking trails connect arts and crafts centers, natural areas and parks, outdoor adventure guides and rental agencies, and business cooperatives open to bicyclists (Metodijeski & Temelkov, 2014).

Regrettably however, the national government has constrained bike tourism supporters through regulations, a lack of consensus on the direction and discourse of tourism development and the mutual benefits for Montenegro, and a failure to implement specific tourism goals or take action to remedy incompatible and non-sustainable practices, especially in the Adriatic region. Though the current administrators state a desire is to conserve the country's heritage, the policies enacted through mid-2018 have instead accelerated construction of foreign-owned, multi-room hotels on the coast, and worsened the country's tourism 'brand' and efforts to celebrate and promote Montenegro's and the West Balkan region's ethnic and natural diversity (A.B.A.T Balkania & The Balkan Forum, 2017).

The result is further marginalization and lost benefits of small scale bicycle tour venues, in favor of mass tourism facilities, more incompatible development, and increased land, air, and water pollution along the Adriatic coast and Boka Kotorska. Bike tourism proponents, therefore, desire a 'win-win' solution that protects the human and natural heritage at the core of Montenegrin's cultural identity, and profits bike tourists and residents equally (Mozer, 2013; National Tourism Organisation of Montenegro, 2013; Vitić-Cetković, 2011; Vitić & Jovanović, 2007).

In response, the following assessment methodology and recommendations are informed by the successful implementation of bike tourism in other similar emergent, post-conflict destinations. With an emphasis on the quality of the visitor experience, rather than the quantity of visitors alone, the process of identifying and implementing critical success factors in Montenegro is considered an essential step in encouraging greater awareness and acceptance of cross-border bicycle tourism, and the industry's potential to benefit the country's rural communities and smaller urban areas, if planned and managed appropriately (Pavlevski, 2012; Tausan, 2010; Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2009; Eijgelaar, Peeters & Piket, 2010; Ringer, 2004; Ringer, 2009; United Nations Development Programme, 2017; Vitić-Cetković, Jovanović & Krstić, 2012).

### **3. Materials & Methods**

To develop an initial understanding of bicycle tourism's current role in Montenegro's rural and cross-border economies and the social, political, economic, and environmental factors necessary for its success, a modified Delphi methodology utilized qualitative and quantitative

data provided by bicycle tourists and proponents to identify selected practices that may better benefit rural, ethnic communities and National Parks in northern Montenegro. Participants were surveyed for travel motives and expectations, as well as user demographics and environmental choices. Montenegrins rank '[a] clean, green environment' (Smith, Puczkó, Michalkó, Kiss & Sziva, 2013, p. 80) higher than the Balkan average, though they spend less time engaged in learning activities and recreation in the mountains, forests, lakes, rivers, or sea (Landeta, 2006).

Tourism proponents and community stakeholders were, therefore, also asked to identify existing environmental practices, policies, and regulations they found lacking or impeded greater collaboration between transboundary agencies. This process provided:

- More detail on the evolving role and growth potential of bicycles in multi-modal/multinational travel and transportation networks in the West Balkan region.
- An inventory of local infrastructure and other assets needed to 'optimize choice and efficiency, enhance opportunity and equity, address public perceptions and attitudes, and especially, promote [bike tourism] safety for all' (City Club of Portland, 2013, p. 1).
- Awareness of relevant resources and expectations for bike tourism in Montenegro and neighboring countries, including user demographics, preferred mode of travel to and within the country, primary recreational interests and travel motives, desired accommodations and support services.
- Knowledge of available 'green' policies and regulatory frameworks that favor bike use.

### ***3.1 Assessment Methodology***

The initial assessment and ranking focused on local priorities and 'do-ability' to satisfy mountain bikers and adventure travelers in four popular destinations: Cetinje (the former capital), Kampovi, Plav, and Kotor (Figure 2). Specific attention was given to CSF that reinforced Montenegro's self-proclamation in 1991 as the world's only 'ecological state' committed to the concept of sustainability (United Nations Development Programme, 2008).

A total of 749 tourists submitted anonymous comments in the initial survey, with 33% from the Balkans (primarily Serbia), and 64% from elsewhere in Europe (Figure 3). The majority were male (59%), perhaps indicative of safety concerns among women bicycling solo in some parts of the region. Nearly 75% of respondents were age 19-50 years, while 25% were under age 18. Most non-resident tourists express greater reliance on personal contacts for travel information, rather than national tourism organizations or media sources. In part, this is because Montenegro travel information is only available in a few foreign languages, and Internet and social media resources are limited for bicycle itineraries and accommodation planning.

Most non-resident respondents came to Montenegro for a beach vacation (47%) or to visit family and friends (16%). Only 5% currently visit nature areas, National Parks, or World Heritage sites in the country. This reflects the government and visitors' preferences for leisure activities on the Adriatic coast, rather than the northern interior, limited bike services in rural areas, and the different attractions frequented by independent bikers and guided tours.

The most popular bike tourist activities reported were museum visits in the former capital, Cetinje (89%), and monastery tours or other religious sites (79%). Local people were the main attraction in Plav (26%), followed by nature visits and scenery (26%). In contrast, cultural

sightseeing ranked third among visitors to Kampovi (31%), while ‘going to the beach’ was the dominant attraction (91%). Regardless of chosen destination in Montenegro, however, visitors prefer to stay in hotels or private homes, with only 7% opting to camp while biking.

Asked to rate Montenegro’s cultural features, almost half said local food and culinary activities (e.g., organic agritourism, ethnic cooking, wine making) were ‘Good’ (46%) or ‘Excellent’ (39%). Visitors who stayed in hotels also found the quality ‘Excellent’ (60%), although campers (66%) and guests of private facilities (72%) reported more satisfaction with their lodging.

Finally, many participants suggested improved bicycle route maps in multiple languages, more hot water and reliable electricity in tourist accommodations, and increased fruit and ethnic food options. Others highlighted infrastructure needs, with complaints about vehicle/bicycle parking and safety at popular bike tourist attractions, the lack of international road symbols, pollution and waste removal in parks, and marketing to international bikers (Marais, du Plessis & Saayman, 2016; Ringer, 2009; Krstić, Janković-Milić, Jovanović, Stanišić, Vitić-Četković & Ringer, in review; Monstat, 2017).

### ***3.2 Results and Discussion***

With this knowledge, several key elements for successful bike tourism in Montenegro were identified and ranked in terms of impact and available resources (Figure 4). Perhaps, the most critical factors for Montenegro’s emerging bicycle tourism industry are the failure to highlight the country’s heritage attractions, and a lack of detailed knowledge of visitor expectations and motives in biking the West Balkan region. Equally absent is a broader understanding of visitor (dis)satisfaction, since visitor discontent may suggest conflicts with the ‘sustainable brand’ and vision promoted by Montenegrin tourism authorities. Furthermore, any dislike expressed by tourists on social media can negatively affect visitor numbers and earnings.

To address the concerns of local leaders, bike tourists, and operators, the government recently designated five distinct cycling regions across Montenegro (Figure 5), with more than 1,200 bicycle routes already created or proposed. Suitable for a wide range of users, these branded bikeways use traditional backroads, rather than more heavily trafficked highways, to combine historic and religious sites with scenic views of forested mountains and snow-capped peaks. The routes are distributed across the country, and targeted to different visitor nationalities and abilities, in order to spread tourist spending more widely and equitably (Bikemap, 2018; Centre for Sustainable Tourism Initiatives, 2008; National Tourism Organisation of Montenegro, 2013).

Bike-friendly communities -- assisted by faculty and students from the University of Montenegro (Kotor), Eberwald University (Germany), and the University of Oregon (USA) -- also initiated multiple waste recovery structures along Montenegro’s bike routes for recyclable and compostable materials. To further reduce waste, bike riders and vendors are pressured to use ‘eco-friendly’ products and to eliminate non-recyclable materials, such as water bottles.

In the Niksic valley, bicycle proponents now envision a 35-kilometer route for the ‘Enhancement of Environmental Tourism in the Regions of Shkodra, Niš, Kraljevo, Nikšić, Peć/Peja.’ Designed to strengthen responsible tourism practices and principles in interior

Montenegro, this bike trail is a segment of ‘Seenet/a trans-local cooperation network between Italy and South-East Europe’ (Associazione Viaggiare I Balcani, 2011, p. 1). Bikers can view historic Roman and medieval ruins while riding through Montenegro’s forested mountains and valleys. On the coast, where urban development and uncontrolled mass tourism have effectively privatized most natural areas, beaches, and shorelines, a bike sharing program is now underway in the Boka Kotorska to encourage non-motorized travel to World Heritage sites in the Bay of Kotor (Kostovski, 2012; Task Force Central and Eastern Europe, n.d.).

In addition, a brand centered on the logo, ‘Wild Beauty,’ was created by Montenegrin tourism supporters to:

- Broaden awareness of the country’s blend of natural scenery and cultural heritage.
- Capitalize on its network of hiking and bike trails in the National Parks and wilderness areas.
- Draw attention to living conditions and economic opportunities in the north.

Through these actions, Montenegrins are responding more effectively to perceived weaknesses in their tourism industry. At the same time, as the benefits of bicycle tourism become increasingly clear, stakeholders must acknowledge the socioeconomic and environmental costs, particularly in rural and transboundary communities.

Bicycle tours still incur considerable resources, though significantly less than traditional travel modes, if riders stay in energy-intensive accommodations or are accompanied by support-and-gear (SAG) vehicles on long-distance itineraries. Therefore, if regional integration and rural development are the primary objectives of bike tourism, attention must be paid to the needs of rural areas, as well as urban centers and the Adriatic coast, and environmental concerns must be measured equally with earnings and investments.

‘Place-based’ criteria and targeted goals for bicycle use and visitor management must also be designed and integrated into multi-modal community development plans in Montenegro. Designated trail networks can be maintained and promoted through partnerships with academic institutions, international bike organizations, and voluntourism. Meanwhile, the Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management in Kotor is well-positioned to offer ‘hands-on’ training to community entrepreneurs and ‘the education and practice of those who plan the development of the profession of a tour guide’ (Topler, 2017, p. 222; see also Chen & Lee, 2017).

Investments in waste reduction and removal are essential to reduce environmental degradation, and designated bike routes require public safety and incentives to reduce conflicts with other users. Connectivity to the ‘host’ community is equally necessary to ensure meaningful interactions for environmental learning and heritage protection.

An effective marketing strategy should target local and visiting international bicyclists, using social media and the Internet to establish ‘Wild Beauty’ as a globally recognized, national brand identity. In our research, many travelers were motivated to visit by others’ descriptions of Montenegro’s scenic landscapes and cultural history. As a result, word-of-mouth was the most important means of advertising to potential bike tourists, followed by interactive websites on the Internet and social media sources (e.g., guest reviews and blogs, Facebook/Instagram personal photo albums). User satisfaction is, therefore, an important indicator of the long-term success of Montenegro’s bicycle tourism.

‘Bicycle-friendly’ signs and maps, in multiple languages, are needed to inform and orient bicyclists, along with secure trails and facilities for cyclists. Education and enforcement of bicycle safety laws is another factor important for successful bike tourism. Drivers’ education programs are encouraged to remind drivers of all traffic laws and to inform bike riders they should respect private property boundaries as they explore scenic attractions.

An inventory must be undertaken to identify the critical human and capital resources to implement and operate a nation-wide bike system in Montenegro and across the region’s borders. This includes the availability of business and language training for local residents interested in bicycle storage, rentals, and repairs, and the transfer of skills to improve customer service and information technology. Government and tourism agencies can assist efforts to nurture and subsidize innovations in bicycle tourism by developing bicycle campgrounds near World Heritage sites and protected areas, and providing the necessary signage to identify signature or priority routes as part of the regional bicycle system.

To fund these outreach and management activities, Montenegrin authorities should consider a tax on bike rentals and tour operations, similar to the 4% excise tax adopted in Oregon. If approved, this money will be dedicated to bicycle safety programs and materials, and the construction of new trails and automated counters.

Visa waivers, liberalized immigration policies, and integrated planning practices and shared strategies will also help promote successful cross-border bicycle tourism. Montenegro attracts large numbers of foreign tourists from neighboring countries (Serbia, Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, and Bulgaria), as well as Russia, the Ukraine, Slovenia, Ireland, and the U.K. These tourists increasingly seek to visit and interpret heritage sites and landscape features that are part of Montenegro’s natural and human history. Yet, their full significance and meaning extends into neighboring countries that share the same social identity and geography. As a result, travelers want greater access to the entire ‘story,’ rather than be barred by political border formalities.

Already, the growing popularity of transborder village tourism in rural areas between Serbia and Macedonia has caused both national governments to create special development zones in partnership with multiple tour operators, and the West Balkan ‘region is [now] trending towards almost a borderless mentality in terms of tourism’ (Pavlevski, 2012, p. 1). If similar actions were applied by Montenegro in concert with nearby countries, the region could employ bicycle tourism to build comparable peaceful, cross-border travel in rural areas and urban centers, and thereby provide a pathway for improved transport networks and accessible public health, poverty alleviation in many households, and the emancipation of women, while encouraging healthy and environmentally friendly modes of travel. To do so, the following steps are recommended:

1. Secure the participation and commitment of local businesses, transportation operators, land management and travel agencies, government and non-government leaders, and financial institutions in Montenegro and other West Balkan countries.
2. Audit available and potential resources to identify suitable routes and the level of product investment required to adequately promote these routes to the most relevant tourism markets.
3. Collect data at the micro- and macro-levels detailing the size and scope of European and international bicycle tourism markets, key tourist demographic segments, trail use designs and use, and economic indicators of the costs and profits from bike tourism.

4. Make sure all stakeholders are fully informed about existing tourism developments and global travel trends, including interested bicycle visitors who, on average, are well-educated, older adults from upper-income households who spend approximately USD \$98 a day or \$1,500 per trip for lodging, food, and equipment (Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin, 2010; BicyclePotential.org, 2013; Eijgelaar, Peeters & Piket, 2010; Ringer, 2004; Ringer, 2009; Rocca, 2011; Weinstein, 2012).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Should these recommendations be fully implemented, Montenegro may build upon bicycle tourism's emerging success to fully profit the country's residents and visitors. Though the industry is growing in popularity, bike tourism remains under-developed and new jobs in the industry have not offset those lost in timber, agriculture, and fishing over the past decade. Yet, the creativity and growth in jobs and income generated by bicycle tourism across the country is certainly noteworthy. Interest among Montenegrins and tourists in biking for pleasure continues to build exponentially, and ridership and bicycle-related business opportunities are expanding as more decision-makers realize Montenegro's bicycle tourists produce benefits across the broader economic spectrum, requiring goods and services beyond those related to biking alone (Kostovski, 2012).

Moreover, unlike visitors to Montenegro's coast or those on an organized bus/auto tour, bike tourists generally spend more time in the local community learning about the culture and natural landscapes. Rather than loll at the beach, they prefer to visit parks and other nature areas, historic sites, museums, forts, and World Heritage sites, as well as wineries and farms, festivals, and artists' homes. Sports events and health spas are other popular venues for bike tourists, and even 'literary tourism can be used as an important tool for branding tourist destinations' (Topler, 2016, p. 135).

Montenegro's bicyclists are also relatively low impact environmentally, despite their wider travels in country, and contribute little traffic or noise to the site visited, unlike motor vehicle tours. In this manner, bicyclists can strongly benefit Montenegro and other Balkan nations to preserve their heritage and history by incentivizing preservation of the natural environment and shared heritage of the region.

In sum, the growth in global tourism arrivals provides tremendous opportunity for Montenegro and the West Balkan nations to move beyond the unresolved distrust and lingering hostility from the Yugoslavian civil war. More people now travel by bike to learn about their world and the global tourism industry is changing in response, as visitors seek 'low impact' travel options through bicycling. As they do, bike tourism provides a tool for sustainable regional and rural development, and a means of conserving the natural and human heritage of a people and their place.

Though the CSF identified in this paper are preliminary and admittedly subjective, reflecting the views and experiences of a small user population over a short period of time, they may allow bike tourism to reduce the existing religious and ethnic distrust and institutional disconnect between former neighbors. If embraced and implemented at the local, national, and regional policy levels, bike tourism in Montenegro can help rebuild the country's transportation infrastructure, create a healthier environment, and ensure greater economic profits for its people.

Furthermore, investments made in bicycle facilities today may provide even greater social and economic impact long-term since a thriving bicycle tourist industry in Montenegro can, in turn, attract and revitalize businesses, create jobs, and increase public revenue across the West Balkan region.

By so doing, bicycle tourism can play a major role in bridging the divide between former foes once united by geography, culture, and history. Through collaborative trail networks and partnerships among bicycle tourists, residents, and travel providers, Montenegro and the West Balkan countries can move closer to achieving both ‘comm-unity’ and sustainability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Freeman, 2011; Roney, 2008; Upadhyay & Chettri, n. d.; Vitić & Ringer, 2007).

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## Appendix A: Survey questionnaire, Cetinje Town



**Turistička organizacija prijestonice Cetinje, Bajova 2, ž.r. 510-8964-17**

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MARKET RESEARCH IN CETINJE MUNICIPALITY (September/October 2008)

1. How did you find out about Cetinje?
  - National tourism office
  - Travel agency
  - Travel guide
  - Internet
  - Social Media
  - Other media (print, TV)
  - Family or friend
  
2. You are in Cetinje ...?
  - 1<sup>st</sup> visit
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> visit
  - I have been here 3+ times
  
3. How did you travel to Cetinje? (circle all means of transport)
  - Bicycle
  - Private car
  - Train
  - Airplane
  - Tour van
  - Public bus
  
4. How long do you plan to stay in this area?
  - Only day visit
  - Overnight (1 night)
  - 2-5 days
  - 6-10 days
  - More than 10 days

5. What type of accommodation did you stay in while visiting?

- Hotel (name)
- Boarding house (name)
- Private accommodation
- No response

6. What was the average cost/night of your stay?

- Hotel
- B&B/boarding house
- Half board

7. What is your evaluation of accommodation quality?

- Excellent
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Decent
- Unsatisfactory
- No response

8. What is your evaluation of food quality?

- Excellent
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Unsatisfactory
- No response

9. How much do you spend daily on recreation, food, and drink (€)?

- Excursion/guided tours
- Souvenirs
- Food and drink
- Entertainment
- Bicycle rentals
- Other transportation (private/public)

10. In Cetinje, which of the following activities or sites did you visit?

- Museums
- Serb Orthodox Monastery and other religious sites
- Hiked through nature
- Walked through town
- Shopping
- Community, social, ethnic, or religious events
- NP Lovcen
- NP Skadar Lake
- Njegos's Mausoleum
- Family and friends

11. What did you find most lacking in Cetinje Municipality?

- Accommodations (number & quality of hotel, B&B, campsite)
- Activities (guided cultural tours, historic site interpretation, outdoor recreation, environmental conservation)
- Public transportation
- Bicycle access (bike trails, off-road paths, ease & cost to rent bikes)
- Signage & visitor information
- International marketing efforts (Internet, social media)

12. What did you particularly like about your visit to Cetinje?

- Accommodations (number & quality of hotel, B&B, campsite)
- Activities (guided cultural tours, historic site interpretation, outdoor recreation, environmental conservation)
- Public transportation
- Bicycle access (bike trails, off-road paths, ease & costs to rent bikes)
- Signage & visitor information
- International marketing efforts (Internet, social media)

13. How could visitor and hospitality services & marketing be improved?

- Internet websites (Montenegro Ministry of Tourism, private tourism providers)
- Social media (TripAdvisor, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)

- Bicycle brochures, maps & road signs

14. What other improvements do you suggest are most needed for successful and sustainable tourism in Cetinje?

15. Please rank your top 3 likes and dislikes about bike tourism in Cetinje?

- Like #1
- Like #2
- Like #3
- Dislike #1
- Dislike #2
- Dislike #3

Personal questions:

1. Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male

2. Age

- 0-18 years
- 19-30 years
- 31-50 years
- 51-70 years
- Over 70 years

3. Place of residence

- Montenegro
- Serbia
- West Balkan country
- Other country (please name)

4. Profession

5. Education

- High school or less
- University education (did not graduate)
- University degree: \_\_\_\_\_ PhD \_\_\_\_\_ MA/MS \_\_\_\_\_ BA/BS

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